Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0241TX-1 for Region One Education Service Center (ESC 1)

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

ESC 1 Has laid out an ambitious and comprehensive vision that supports the four assurance areas identified in the ARRA.The applicant's efforts are directed towards one of the most economically rural/urban depressed areas in the state. The key features of the application build on ESC 1's track record of reform while at the same time acknowledging where improvements are needed, e.g., enhancement of longitudinal data system andimpact on targeted populations of at risk students. ESC proposes to allocate the largest portion of RTT resources to three priority areas: 8th to 9th grade transition, high school grade band systemic support and turn-around of low achieving high schools. Key components described in the ESC vision are strongly aligned with research based evidence and the application selection criteria. ESC 1 will make a special effort to coordinate and align with other entities outside the education sphere. The terms and conditions of the MOUs reflect a strong commitment from the 11 participating LEAS to carry out the goals and objectives outlined in the application.

Several critical components should be further elaborated:

> a) a more detailed presentation and discussion of data as it applies to the participating LEAs as opposed to the overall service region.

> b) documentation addressing ESC 1's track record of success focused on closing achievement gaps of at-risk populations in the region as well as the identified RTT-LEAs.

> c) identification of challenges likely to be encountered based on past experience

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	9

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 application includes documentation pertaining to the three specified criterion under this section:

> 1. ESC 1 has identified11 of the highest need districts within its overall service area and along with 42 high need schools within these districts using a three-tiered criteria: Priority Schools/Stage 4 or 5 AYP, Focus Schools/Stage 2 or 3 AYP and Support Schools/Stage 1 AYP.

> 2. The application includes a list of the 42 participating schools along with each school's student enrollment characteristics (ethnicity, low income, EL, SPED, at-risk) and status in the Title I school improvement program.

> 3. The number of overall low income students (28,622) satisfies the 40% eligibility criteria.

Given the large service area of ESC 1, having a clearly defined targeted population process which identifies a subset within the consortium, as well as, within participating LEAs will help focus program effectiveness and impact.

The application does not specifically indicate what students are included in the "At Risk" Column/Table 1 in accordance with the High Need Student definition as outlined in the Notice. Clarification is, also, needed on whether the RTT-District funded program offerings will be limited to the 42 sites or whether other campuses within the 11 participating LEAS will have access to any of the program services described in the application, e.g. P-K -7 th grade.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

ESC1 has presented a well thought-out plan to support its articulated goals and objectives. The application narrative describes the major elements including 8 Strategic Guiding Principles and 5 key objectives. In other sections of the application, information is provided which addresses project and site based staffing assignments and resource allocation. Appendix 31 provides further plan details including activities to be undertaken, timelines, deliverables and responsible parties. The application's clear approach, detailed implementation strategies along with embedded continuous improvement activities, provides evidence that meaningful reform will likely be achieved. A detailed logic model is included as part of the application. While the plan overall receives high marks for its quality there are selected areas noted thoughout this review where further clarificaitons and elaborations are needed. Establishing credibility, a high level of effectiveness and proven results are the first steps needed to address scale up. While sustainabilty efforts are described later in the application there is only minimal attention given to how program results from TL2 will be scaled up within participating LEAS nor other districts in the ESC 1 service area.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	4

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC1 application describes an ambitious set of performance goals covering grades Pre-K through high school along with targets for decreasing achievement gaps, increasing graduation and college enrollment rates, however, the 42 participating schools that have been selected to be part of RTT have been targeted to include only grades 8 through12. ESC 1 goals are indicated to be equal to the performance levels set by the state for ESEA targets based on the STARR assessments. The STARR assessment in the years 2011-12 to 2015-16 is undergoing a phase in process by grade level and subject-matter content. ESC has provided improved student outcome goals across 11 different districts and further delineated by specific assessments, grade levels and subgroups.

Further clarity is needed to understand:

a) student participation rates for the high school assessments in ELA and math and whether the current number is projected to increase over the 4 year grant period as a result of RTT interventions

b) If different than the State ESEA targets, the rationale behind the growth targets projected for the highest achieving subgroup (Allstate White students) by 2015-16.

Additionally, the application does not adequately explain the process used for determining and establishing differential annual gap closure targets by subgroups compared to the highest achieving All State White subgroup across each of the specific performance levels (I,.II and III) and individual subjects. The targets for gap closure are also not substantiated by a sound rationale aligned with specific

intervention strategies nor based on a demonstrated track record of success in this area as noted in B below.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	9

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The data provided by ESC 1, describes overall regional gains across multiple variables including mathematics (6.6% increase), science (16.4%) and reading (4%) which are evidenced by TAK scores covering 2007/08—2010/11. Improvement gains are also documented showing increases in the number of high school graduates and the college-going rate. The documentation addressing improved student achievement and learning represents aggregate data based on the 45 LEAs served by ESC 1 region and the overall student enrollment. Additional accomplishments cited include impressive gains resulting from student participation in GEAR UP, High School Redesign Project (HSRDP) and Creating Connection to College.

ESC 1 highlights EL and SPED subgroups as key areas where they have seen gains in closing achievement gaps. For example, between 2007/08 and 2010/11, the EL population has remained stable as demonstrated by TAKS scores. Across 25 participating GEAR up sites in the region, 58% of the Gear Up EL Cohort students met minimum standards compared to 49% region wide.

While ESC purports to have a record of achievement gains there is minimal documentation related to achievement gap closure. The application does not provide evidence of progress made by the referenced SPED subgroup. Additionally, evidence-based documentation of achievement changes of overall student populations and specific subgroups across the 42 participating schools is not included.

Over the past 4 years, ESC1 has implemented a variety of reform programs and customized interventions focused on the lowest achieving schools within its service area. Services provided by ESC are targeted to multiple audiences (students, parents, teachers and administrators) and emphasize continuous systemic improvement. Examples include: data utilization, technical assistance in the development of school improvement plans, and capacity building. The impact of these supports have resulted in increases by ESC 1 LEAs and charters meeting AYP along with a decrease in the number of LEAs missing AYP.

ESC 1 supports in the area of data are largely directed towards educators and administrators. The service center is leading efforts to integrate multiple data systems and provides LEAS a variety training programs which provide up to date assessment and extensive instructional delivery information. The service center has also implemented STARR One, an assessment bank, that LEAS can draw on in building rigorous benchmark assessments. The application does not address how parents and students are provided access to performance data nor how they are supported in its interpretation and use to improve student achievement.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application fully meets the three components of this criteria--a through d. ESC1 has committed to further broaden access to local level public information while continuing to protect confidentiality. ESC1 will also work collaboratively with RTT LEA partners to establish guidelines and rules for transparency, fiscal accountability and exceptional governance practices.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

There are no apparent extant barriers or constraints that would inhibit full implementation of the ESC 1 RTT –District proposal. Several state reform initiatives are closely aligned with the ARRA assurances. Under local governance legal requirements, LEAs in Texas are afforded full independence and autonomy in operations. Several state reform initiatives, e.g. Texas Student Data System and College and Career Readiness Standards also provide supportive context for local and regional educational programs.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	6

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The application describes a variety of meetings and engagement activities that have occurred over the last 18 months and those held more recently related to development of the RTT proposal. The application narrative indicates that engagement related to the RTT-District application has occurred at both the LEA and community levels. This narrative description does not fully align with documentation provided in Appendix 15. Attendance at the three focus groups appears to have involved mostly administrators across the 42 schools. The application does not provide specific evidence of community, family, student, or parent engagement. Aside from the below noted letters of support, evidence is not provided for the inclusion of "diverse perspectives" representing private businesses and institutions of higher education, community and political leaders.

An electronic survey was developed and disseminated to subject matter teachers in science, ELA, Mathematics, and Social Studies teachers and other educators generating a 72% response rate in favor of the ESC 1 RTT-D initiative. Clarification is needed to ensure the response rate represents only teacher responses and not other educators. The RTT-District proposal was distributed to survey respondents for public commentary for 10 business days. While the application describes a general process of how feedback comments were categorized and reviewed, it does not document what specific feedback was received nor how the proposal was revised in response to the comments received.

 In order to generate additional support, capital and in-kind resources, ESC 1 has established partnerships with 26 participating LEAs, community based organizations, higher education institutions, and private businesses.The application includes 25 letters of support from key stakeholders representing local businesses, philanthropic organizations, Head Start, universities, libraries, test development, companies ,media, educational support organizations and political leaders.

On October 22, the ESC 1 RTT proposal was delivered to the Texas Education Agency for comments provided. Similarily on October 22, requests for commentary were made of 11 mayors and 1 county Commissioner to provide commentary. On October 24, ESC 1 received notice that the state is not providing review or comment on any RTT-District application. Support letters were received from a total of 8 Mayors and the County Commissioner for Rio Grande City.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	3

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Given that the application is sponsored by a consortium comprised of 42 LEAS, the documentation provided addresses largely regional issues as opposed to the target communities. The application has presented a compelling analysis of needs associated with demographic shifts occurring throughout the state. Translation of these shifts to regional impact include low academic achievement, high drop-out rates, high incidences of poverty, high unemployment and increasing presence of English Learners. Taken as a whole, gaps that exist between ESC1 achievement results and the state average range from 1%

differential in 10th grade math to 7% differential in 9th grade ELA. High need areas identified in a recent regional survey conducted by ESC1 identified the following key areas in need of attention: professional development in core content areas, knowledge of and skills in ways to integrate personalized learning and assistance in reaching goals set forth in the new state accountability system.

The application falls short in providing adequate documentation of the following:

a)   "an analysis of the applicant's current status in implementing personalized learning environments" in general and with specific application to the target areas . (The application does not include.documentation of past evaluations, satisfaction survey results, data from continuous improvement efforts, or impact data related to student achivement in the targeted LEAs and schools and in particular gap closure.)

b) a specific needs or gap analysis covering the demographics of the 11 participating LEAS and 42 participating schools to determine the extent of comparability of needsand gaps to the state and region.

c) the logic behind the reform proposal contained within the applicant's proposal including rationale and alignment of strategies to specific outcomes as identified by the targeted participants in the 11 participating LEAs

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	**20**	**14**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

A long standing track record and past experience in educational reform tied to research-based practice, puts the consortium in a strong posistion to support the approaches defined under this criterion. For each of the subcomponents under Learning, the application articulates a comprehensive array of program initiatives and activities to engage students and parents which are strongly supported by research and proven practice evidence. A number of in school and community based strategies will be implemented to provide students opportunities to be involved in decision making about their learning, as well as, supportive venues and structures related to establishing a college going culture. Technology integration is embedded as strong feature of the TL2 program including ongoing training, technical support, mentoring and ensuring access to a variety of equipment and software.

The approaches presented are conveyed at a high level of description which is an important starting point but does include adequate details to indicate how what is proposed will be strattegically and operationally implemented and managed across all 11 LEA district and school sites, the frequency of the offerings, etc. The application narrative does not indicate responsibility for the various programs and initiatives presented.

With the exception of the reference to the translation of parent presentations, services and materials, the application is substantially lacking in providing access and exposure to diverse cultures as required by Criterion a) iv. Clarification is also needed on the extent to which the proposed approaches in this section are integrated into the overall ESC 1 project logic model and timeline (Appendix 31). Without such details, it is difficult to judge whether the numerous approaches presented will in actuality reach all 33,000 plus students and can be effectively implemented with fidelity..

	Available	Score
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	**20**	**14**

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

ESC 1 has set forth an impressive program focused on turnaround school improvement and college and career readiness. Similar to the Learning section description, the ESC 1 application describes a wide variety of teaching and leading activities and supports which will be provided that are based on best practices. THe majority of criteria components are addressed. Notable strengths in the instructional areas include: training on differentiated pedagogical strategies, implementation of project based and cooperative learning strategies and support for effective applications of College and Career standardsAmong the foci will be job-embedded professional development, one on one coaching and interactive media. Teachers will be involved in continuous improvement activities drawing on student achievement, teacher evaluation and program data and making adjustments as needed. Innovative technology resources and applications will be utilized to both access information and modify instructional practices. ESC 1's collaborative relations with an extensive network of other consortia, state and Ivy Leagues universities and local community organizations and programs is impressive.

While the application describes a comprehensive set of approaches to support teachers, principals and district leaders that have proven to be effective and judged to have high merit, the structure for implementation and management is missing. The application does not provide the fully delineated scope (complete elements of a high quality plan) for its teacher and leadership support approach, e.g. targeted participants, numbers of meetings and PD offerings, frequency of interactions, responsible parties, etc. Clear performance goals for all implementation activities are also needed along with a timeline and schedule for delivery. The application should also address in a more thorough manner how the needs of EL and students with disabilities will be included across the spectrum of approaches as well as how efforts will be targeted to ensure thee high need students receive instruction from effective/highly effective teachers.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	12

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The application addresses the criteria in this section including the assignment of staff and establishment of multi –level governance structures. Two senior level existing staff will provide oversight and operational responsibility for the implementation of TL2. There is already a mutually agreed upon governance structure described in the MOUs signed by the 11 participating LEAs that specifies roles, responsibilities, decision making commitments, support services, financial obligations. An Executive Council (comprised of the ESC 1 Project Director, superintendents and principals of Consortium LEAs) to be appointed within 100 days after the receipt of grant funds will serve as the primary decision making entity. Additional tiers of infrastructure configurations will be comprised of district central office and school based leadership teams.

LEA Boards and superintendents have been granted authority by the state and site-based management has already been mandated at the school level. District Leadership teams and the Executive Council will collaborate to clearly outline defined autonomy, site based management, and flexible proven practices for both veteran and novice principals.

Overall ESC 1 has presented a thoughtful and valid set of concepts and implementation strategies, to address the major elements of this criteria:

> 1. The ESC 1 personalized learning model is based on an approach focused on helping students to reach three levels of mastery tied to the state's end of course standard. The model incorporates

key features aimed at replacing the traditional form of instruction, such as direct instruction, collaborative learning groups, independent learning and individualized instruction.

2. To address criteria D 1) d through ESC 1, schools will be provided with current research and proven flexible practices which allow students to master standards at multiple ties and multiple ways, e.g. , varied curriculum choices, teacher paced group instruction, technology learning access in school/out of school learning environments.

2. ESC 1 personalized learning approach is aligned with research-based -best practices that will be promoted through on site coaching and professional development offerings to teachers covering a range of topics focused on teaching and learning design and delivery.

The application describes in general terms the flexibility factors that will be addressed consistent with the criteria but does not identify specific approaches that have been prioritized based on participating school needs.

The proposal also does not provide sufficient details that address specific learning resources that will be directed to English Learners or students with disabilities which have been identified throughout the proposal as high need students, e.g. the extent to which SPED and EL teachers will be targeted for participation, assurance of demonstrated expertise to address these populations within the ESC staff or consultant pool, pro-active parent engagement, evidence of research based accommodations and differentiated instructional practices tied specifically to needs of SPED and EL students.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application describes several activities that will be pursued to address ensuring all students, educators and community stakeholder have access to personalized learning resources including informational translations in Spanish, targeted staff recruitment and hiring, adaptations of learning resources, instructional practices and assurances of equal program participation. These activities presented, e.g.. bilingual translations of informational materials, are judged to be essentially status quo and not sufficiently assertive in response to Criteria D (2). The application indicates that program recruitment and implementation plans will include specific strategies for equal participation, including English learners and students with disabilities but does provide examples of such strategies.

The application also does not address out of school learning resource options as required to support the implementation of its proposal.

ESC 1 is highly commended for its technology systems, as well as, its present and proposed enhanced database management systems. Drawing on this expertise and comprehensive resources, participating schools, LEAs and individuals will have access to a diverse array of data sets. Through various technology platforms ESC offers teachers, parents and students online electronic tutoring, teaching and mentoring, and distance learning services, as well as, new instructional technologies. Assurance of appropriate technical support is expected to be provided through a mentoring/coaching component described for students, parents and teachers. General descriptive information on how teachers would be involved is provided but not the other referenced groups. This mentoring component does not appear to be structured on needs based findings. Specific details on the infrastructure and frequency of mentoring services is not delineated.

ESC 1 is uniquely situated based on past experience to build on its existing database management system which will be transformed into an interoperable system. ESC already has in place several technology systems and also a region-wide longitudinal data base. The consortium also provides technical support to consortium districts, e.g. Web hosting, firewall services and video conferencing. The proposed

customized and enhanced data management system will provide all consortium teachers, staff and school administrators with a diverse array of actionable data.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	12

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 approach to continuous improvement is comprehensive and thorough based on its articulated major components which include a collaboratively developed vision, data gathering and analysis, plan development and implementation and assessment of impact . Data production and analyses will be structured utilizing various formats throughout the grant period. ESC 1 will employ an external evaluator. Additionally, regular meetings to review data will be held with teachers and principals. The Executive Council, District Leadership Teams and project staff will convene monthly to assess process and outcome measures and performance indicators. District and campus leadership teams will also routinely be involved within their respective LEAs and schools in the ongoing assessment of student data.

ESC plans to develop a robust short term and longitudinal data system which will serve as a major resource for the continuous improvement activities outlined. Ongoing quarterly reports will be developed and presented documenting implementation progress, program impact and challenges.

Areas of needed improvement include:

a) an overall management for the multiple layers of the continuous improvement process

b) further delineation of use of data and possible program alterations at the district and school levels

bc) indication of how findings information will be publicly shared and intersect with the activities described under Criteria E 2-- ongoing communication and engagement.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

ESC 1 has laid out an impressive and active engagement plan focused on parents, students teachers and administrators. Engagement strategies involving each of the referenced stakeholder categories include: monthly community based forums and training session for parents, student led councils, Youth Leadership Forums and surveys, and quarterly engagements led by principals with teachers and staff in their respective campuses. Bi-annually principals and superintendents will convene to discuss needed improvement strategies. Standardized and customized reports will also be made available through multiple modes of communication.

A diverse group of stakeholders including partner representatives (institutions of higher education, non-profit,, private and community based organizations) and the business community were involved in the design of TL2, however the application does not address how these individuals or organizations will be engaged during the 4 year implementation time frame.

	Available	Score
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 application presents a wide-range and ambitious list of 38 individual performance measures, thus exceeding the requirements of this selection criteria. The measures are disaggregated by 8 subgroup categories. Rationale Is provided for several of the measures such as college readiness and college entrance examinations, as well as, those related to academic rigor.The application does not provide a rationale nor address the process undertaken to identify or select the performance measures that fall outside of those specified in the application criteria. A large number of the performance measures presented show clear alignment to TL2 Logic Model and statement of objectives buseveral do not. While the application sets forth significant growth targets for each of the 8 subgroup populations and demonstrated progress is expected, it does not provide a rationale for how these improvement rates were determined.   Further, even after 4 years subgroup distinctions still remain, e.g. a 31% differential in African-Americans and White students scoring at Level III on the STARR and a 23% distinction between EL and White students performance at Level II in Geometry. Absent an understanding of how growth targets were determined and the lack of a clearly documented track record in reducing gaps in the region, raises a serious concern about whether the measures set forth are indeed be achievable.

On the positive side, the application describes a comprehensive continuous improvement plan which with effective management oversight, data collection and analysis should provide timely information for assessing progress and driving improvement. Overall the plan would benefit from an overall analysis to ensure tighter coherence and detailed alignment to expected outcomes across all levels and components.The framework for reviewing and improving measures over time appears reasonably articulated at this point in the development of the TL2 plan and proposal.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 application includes adequate documentation that it meets the specified criterion under this section. In addition to utilization of rigorous continuous improvement processes, an expert evaluator will be hired. The evaluation approach described represents a high quality plan. The evaluation design and methodology adhere to standards of best practice and will include both summative and formative evaluations. The key focus of the evaluation will be on assessing impact on students outcomes and secondarily it will also look for systemic changes in school practices and decision making processes similar to those outlined in the selection criteria, e.g.., parent and community partner engagement, modification of school structures, technology integration, professional development, etc.

Under Criteria E 1, the application outlines a detailed plan for ongoing continuous improvement involving participants at the project, district and campus levels as well as ongoing community engagement. Several enhancements are recommended for attention to improve what has been presented in order to more fully align with the requirements of Criteria E1 and 4. Included in the description of the ESC evaluation plan are procedures for quarterly review of evaluation findings, identified challenges and needed improvements by the various governing structures. The evaluation data and recommendations made by these entities will be considered for adoption by the Executive Director in the future activities of TL2.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 budget presentation covers the four cores elements of this criteria. The application requests a total amount of $39.9 M. The application also describes the supplemental amounts totaling $10.2 M that have been pledged from LEA contributions, foundations higher education institutions and community organizations either in-kind or cash. The one time investment referenced in the budget narrative includes resources in the amount of $318,341 that will be used during the Introduction and Implementation Phases (January –August 2013). Given the comprehensive scope of work and the targeted number of high need students to be served, the budget is judged to be reasonably sufficient ,realistic and aligned to the proposed program goals and objectives. ESC has provided a thoughtful and detailed summary narrative for each budget category as well as project level itemized expenditures on an annual basis.

Specific concerns raised as a result of reviewing the budget include the adequacy of resource allocations assigned to the following program components:

      a) proactive communication and engagement of diverse community stakeholders

      b) management of technology distributions and assurance of technology cost investments are fully alignment with specific program and instructional strategies as well as, student achievement outcomes

      c) differentiated approaches to support improved outcomes for EL and SPED students

      d) overall project management personnel sufficient to support the project director especially in the area of continuous improvement

Additionally, assurance should be provided that the RTT grant will be used exclusively for the RTT Consortium LEAS and schools and not co-mingled with other ESC 1 services directed to regional constituents. As part of the long term sustainability strategy, resource allocations should be directed to building the capacity of local constituencies, institutions and organizations, thus requiring less externally funded support in the future.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	9

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC proposal addresses primarily sustainability of its efforts at the end of the RTT –District grant but not scale up to a great extent. The Consortium appears to be a valued and respected resource in the region particularly in its ability to offer efficiencies through multiple client-servicing. It is well positioned to garner community support and the needed financial resources required to maintain the RTT-District program far into the future.

 ESC 1 has a demonstrated capacity, expertise and track record in leveraging sizeable resources (i.e. over 6 years ESC has generated $80,000,000 in federal state and private dollars to support efforts in schools turn around, college and career awareness, technology integration, etc.) Given the uncertainties of revenue streams, ESC 1 has laid out a quality plan including a future budget framework and reasonable targets for sustainability drawing on multiple revenue sources.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	4

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

ESC 1 has identified 6 partner organizations that will be engaged in augmenting the strategies and activities outlined in its primary proposal focused on 11 targeted high need LEAS. Letters of support have been received from these organizations expressing a willingness to assist in improving the academic,

economic and social conditions of targeted students and their families. The application provides minimal descriptions of the partners and their respective roles. While the application responds to many of the specified components outlined under this criteria, it does not provide a coherent operational plan detailing how partners will specifically carry out their respective roles, e.g. the number, frequency and types of activities, financial commitments, a timeline, staffing allocations or responsible parties. Futher, there is no evidence that development of such a plan is intended.

The application provides general descriptions of the target populations (i.e. target 8th grade students, target students and subgroups) but does not specify which of 33, 889 students in grades 8-12 and their families involved in the TL2 program will be served by partner organizations under this proposed augmentation. It is unrealistic to expect that such a sizeable group can be effectively reached by only 6 organizations.

The alignment between the desired population results, the tracking efforts methodology/indicators and the Performance Measures is unlcear.

The proposed scale up strategy is largely directed to the larger TL2 program effort as opposed to the specific partnership model. The main application provides a strong sustainablity plan but does not address scale up in a significant way..

The rationale and methodology used for establishing 2011-2012 baseline and projected growth targets , is not substantiated.

Given the large target population size and absent operational details, the feasibility of impact and the performance targets are questionable. Overall, the description provided lacks clarity and sufficient focus to adequately address the intent of this competitive priority.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	**Met/Not Met**	**Met**

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 application addresses the four areas specified in the ARRA. The Consortium has set forth an ambitous reform agenda consistent with the RTT-District vision and goals. The plan articulates a comprehensiv , innovative and bold set of actions. The target audience includes 33,969,362 students enrolled in 11 participating LEAS, their families and teachers. The ESC 1 application addresses all criterion components and embodies a results oriented approach including specific student achievement targets, focuses on reducing gaps and projects an increase in the percent of career and college ready high school graduates across all subgroups. A major feature of the proposal is data-based continuous improvement. The budget presents an overall and project level fiscal plan. Even though some elements of improvements are warranted, overall, ESC 1 is viewed to have strong capacity to launch its ambitious agenda building on its accomplishments, its already established multi district infrastructure, as well as, applying lessons learned from previous reform investments.

Total	210	153

Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0241TX-2 for Region One Education Service Center (ESC 1)

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	9

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This LEA is a consortia of 11 LEAs and an Education Service Center (ESC), all have agreed to the plan as indicated in their memorandums of understanding (mou). The ESC is serving as the lead LEA. The consortia has entitled their efforts "Teachers as Leaders of Learning (TL2) Ensuring Academic Rigor for All." Trying to organize and support 42 high needs schools with a total of 33,889 students is in itself a daunting task. The consortia have set forth seven parts to their vision:

1. Research based strategies that focus on highly effective educators, effective instructyion, change management and transparent policies
2. Coherent standards based and rigorous curriculum
3. Structures that foster collaborative learning and personalized student and educator support systems
4. School - university - community collaborations
5. Supportive organizational policies, procedures and transparencies that ensure highly effective and qualified teachers, principals and superintendents
6. Continuous improvement processes for evaluating student and educator outcomes and improving instruction
7. On-going, job-embedded professional growth opportunities

The vision, with these seven strands is comprehensive and ambitious since it addresses the needs of all students in these schools. It involves all stake holders and is centered on student achievement. While this section has not mentioned deepening student learning, the appendix document indicates how the plan will set higher standards and expectations of all as compared with current practice.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The consortia partners have agreed to implement a framework of initiatives that range from a system of oversight and monitoring to service delivery and support. The ESC recognizes that the schools need different levels of intervention.This differentiation of approaches for each set of schools allows for the type of change each needs. A facilitator will be hired for each campus under this plan. In addition there is a leadership team from the Education Service Center and school leadership teams who will all coordinate efforts toward student achievement. The schools are divided into three categories depending on their level of AYP need:

- Priority Schools are generally in the bottom 5% in the nation and are identified for stage 4 or 5 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- Focus Schools have low graduation rates, large achievement gaps or low student sub-group performance and are identified for stage 2 or 3 AYP.

- Support Schools due to recent graduation rates and low subgroup performance are identified at stage 1 AYP.

The selected schools all did not meet AYP. Since all schools are involved, all seem motivated to improve student performance. All meet the demographic requirements for their students. In the appendix, there is a list of all the participating schools and their demographics.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

This high quality plan includes 8 strategic guiding principles that serve as the conditions necessary to create change in this consortium. They include a comprehensive set of priorities that are coordinated by the ESC 1 to reform education through schools and systems. These prinicples are supported by 5 key projects and objectives. The principles are:

1. Comprehensive Needs Assessment
2. Data Driven Instruction and Learning Systems and Structures
3. Resource Utilization
4. Technology Integration and Database Systems
5. College/Career Readiness Climate and Culture
6. Administrator and Teacher Effectiveness and Leadership
7. Family, Community and Student Support/Advocacy
8. Standards Aligned Curriculum, Assessment and Intervention System

The ESC 1 is planning to focus on the school campus as the unit of change: to focus on teacher effectiveness and serving the needs of all students. The projects to support this change are well defined and detailed. They plan to use a systemic approach to focus on high standards, in this case the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), utilize data systems to improve and personalize instruction, build capacity of master teachers and leaders, create a Turnaround Series to turn around the lowest achieving schools, and focus on College and Career Readiness.

Since the ESC 1 has worked with schools in the past to help them to improve systemically, they are poised to reform education and transform not only these schools in the consortium, but others who follow their model.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	5

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium's plan is likely to result in improved student learning and performance since they developed a comprehensive TL2 Theory of Change diagram that delineates and describes the various aspects of the plan and how they fit together.

The data presented by all of the schools in the consortium indicate an expectation of significant growth for all subgroups based on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessment system. Since baseline data for any year is not included, it is difficult to determine if the goals are achievable. They are certainly ambitious in their scope: all subgroups, nearly 34,000 students and 11 school systems, but since varying levels of achievement are indicated for the schools, the ambitous quality of the goal cannot be stated.

The expecation that there will be a closing of achievement gaps among the subgroups is clear in the stated expectation of the percentage of students expected to attain levels I, II, or III. The levels are explained as requiring less support as they increase and indicating academic readiness for college or careers. Depending on the school, in most cases 75% or more students in each subgroup are expected to achieve at a level II or III. However, the disparity between subgroups remains the same, thereby not closing the achievement gap, just moving it to a higher level.

The data also indicates an expectation that not only will 80% or more students enroll in postsecondary education, but that 16 months after graduation, they will still be enrolled. This is ambitious, especially so for schools that are in the bottom 5% for student achievement. Postsecondary degree attainment was not addressed.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	13

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium's lead LEA, ESC 1, has had a record of success in working with many other grants and school systems. They cite improvments made to student achievement in many schools, increased graduation rates, reductions in drop-out rates and college readiness on the part of more students. Despite the economic disadvantages of many students in the area, there has been steady improvement of academic scores of students in the schools with whom ESC 1 has worked.

One of the projects, the High School Redesign Project, supported two of the largest districts in the region. Findings from this project reinforced the capacity of ESC 1 in leading and supporting LEAs in implementing the proposed TL2 initiative. In 2009-10, in these two districts, 85.17% of students scored at proficient or advanced in English Language Arts. This increased to 89.6% in 2010-11.More students took AP/IB courses during this time and students receiving a diploma increased by 11.4%.

In a graph, ESC 1 shows how support to schools who failed to meet AYP improved these schools so that more of them met AYP in succeeding years. ESC 1 emphasizes the importance of customizing effects to the specific context of each school campus through the involvement of leadership teams. They describe these leadership teams and their roles. This system helps to build capacity for leadership and helps the teams put organizational structures, policies and procedures in place to make progress toward meeting school improvement goals. In these two examples, and the others that ESC 1 provides, it is clear that they have addressed and achieved ambitious and significant reforms in a number of low achieving schools.

ESC 1 and the consortium have a data system that is capable of matching each student's academic achievement with individual teachers.   It aslo has the capability to provide timely data back to educators and their supervisors on student progress. They will continue to develop this data system to include assessment systems, real-time accounting for school functions, systems that link multiple data systems and a system that evaluates the performance of educators. They are aslo linked to the state's assessment data system. All of this provides a very rich data base. However, no mention was made of students or parents being informed through this system, or any other, of student progress.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 and LEAs in this consortium plan to substantially broaden access to local level public education information and data while protecting the confidentiality of indviduals. They state that data can be fully and easily accessed by interested parties and stakeholders through a variety of venues: district web-sites, annual audits, school budgets, local newspapers, board meeting minutes, job descriptions, newsletters, school public broadcast, annual reports, grant applications etc. The consortium members all make public the personnel salaries listed in the grant criteria. They are also connected to the Texas rating system which supplies major financial documentation.

The data is available to local constituents who are diligent enough to access the many venues listed for the data. It is not easily accessible in one location.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

School districts in Texas are independent and autonomous. However, they are supported through Education Service Centers and there are state initiatives that support school reform. There is a greater emphasis on college and academic readiness in the state, along with the need to close significant performance gaps across racial/ethnic groups. Some of the intiatives in Texas that will support the consortium's plan include:

- Adoption of the College and career readiness standards
- Early College high schools - these are autonomous small schools designed to create a seamless transition form high school to college.
- K-16 vertical teams - to forge consensus on instructional standards, identify useful classroom resources and serve as a sounding board for policy implementation
- Texas Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (T-STEM) Academies - these are rigorous secondary schools focused on improving instruction and academic performance in STEM areas
- College for all
- Texas Stuent data Systems - a statewide longitudinal data system

These systems will assist with professional development, resources and supplying the necessary support for the projects in this plan. The school district's autonomy will allow them the necessary flexibility to implement the reforms needed in the plan.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	9

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC hosted focus groups with district and school administrators, teachers, educators, private businesses, institutions of higher education, community and political leaders and parents. Through the work they do with the districts in their region, they have a network of advisory councils involving superintendents, curriculum leaders, district leadership teams, and teacher focused advisory committees. They have spent the last 18 months gaining input from thousands of educators, political leaders, parents and other stakeholders. In addition, they had an online survey for participating LEAs to use in gaining the support from teachers administrators and other educators. There was also a comment period of 10 days and the comments were reviewed and considered. They have received 72% educator support. The participating districts have also agreed to use their own facilities, equipment, supplies, classrooms, transportation and administrative services at no cost to the grant.

Ten local and private organizations have pledged support and substantial in kind resources and capital. The letters are included in the appendix, and represent institutions of higher education, Texas Instruments and a local news station. There are no letters representing the subgroups of students or from parents or parent groups. Considering the large Hispanic population in this area, some support from that part of the community would have supported the plan.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

ESC 1 has thoroughly examined their needs and data in this section. They conclude that their students perform below the state average in all academic areas as measured by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Most of their students do not speak English at home and due to poverty, either drop out or need to work part-time jobs to help support their families. Many of the families do not

understand the requirements, time or processes involved in post secondary education, therefore, few of their students enroll or continue in education beyond high school.

Another need and cause for concern is the need for effective educators. Approximately 20% of their teachers are considered higly effective. Another 20% have a Bachelor's Degree, about 9% have no degree at all, and about 35% have 5 or less years of experience. Teachers have asked for more professional development opportunities.

The ESC 1 is descriptive and open in the neeeds assessment in this section. The plan provided, with its emphasis on differentiating services for each of the three types of schools is likely to be successful in meeting these needs.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	**20**	**15**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC1 and the consortium schools have described comprehensively a personalized approach to teaching and learning. The five major initatives of TL2 as described in section A, are integrated into this process. The universal goal is to create methods, tools and processes that contiually and systematically help students to shape customized pathways to college, career and life success.

There are several programmatic supports that includes parents, educators and all students. These include:

- 8th Grade Summer Bridge program - provide 8th Graders with the information to make well-educated choices upon entering 9th Grade
- Customized Graduation College Plans for students - a 4 year plan with a personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development leading toward mastery of college/career ready standards and graduation requirements
- Colleg Access Program - counselors, along with Parents select appropriate courses, improve student support competencies and provide workshops on post-secondary education. School personnel involve each student and his/her parent in the program to ensure that each student completes a coherent program of academic study
- Digital Access, Outreach and Awareness Activities - through this plan, there will be created an open digital and media based network to provide public outreach. The website will offer digitized video and webinars on a variety of topics.
- iTunesU platform - a web based platform to provide rapid access of instrumental knowledge about college readiness, pathways and financial literacy to students, parents and the community. This also serves as a means to support the sustainability and scalability of the plan beyond the grant period.

One of the strengths of this plan is that it promotes a deep approach to learning with one-to-one advising and reflection on learning between teacher and student, as well as both formative and summative assessment of learning. This one-on-one approach ensures that students are not allowed to fail and that a student's progress is being monitored. Assignments are to be high quality appropriate to student interest, and feedback will be timely to promote further learning. In addition, service learning experiences will expose students to diverse cultures, contexts, perspectives and promote deep learning. Students then are motivated to learn when they see its usefulness and contribution to their community.

Students will be provided autonomy and freedom to be involved in the decision making concerning their learning. A Youth Leadership Council for Learning in each school will help students to be involved in creating a college-going environment on their campus. Parents will be treated as collaborative partners

and given a full range of information and involvement regarding college access. students and parents will be encouraged to attend a College for All Conference and Parent Leadership Retreats. This increased involvement with parents and students ensures more buy-in to the educational process.

There will be a mentoring program involving high school and college students called "Millenials Teaching Millenials." Through cyber-mentoring, students will have access to a mentor at a remote location via technology based platform connections. This will help students and parents to have a more realistic sense of what college life involves.

The increased rigor necessary for students to be successful in college is also addressed in this plan. These listed are only some of the plans that will be implemented:

- Emphasis will be placed on increasing student access to rigorous and challenging courses through specific plans listed in the appendix.
- Helping students to develop problem-solving skills and workforce competencies through project based learning activities
- Establishing a a structured system of supplemental offerings before, during and after school to enable struggling students to complete a course of study.
- Providing opportunities for educational study trips, guest speakers and workshops that supplement college core curriculum.

Another strength of this plan is that each student will work with an advisor to discuss curriculum and course sequence, and develop personalized learning plans. Advisors will engage in a variety of activities designed to help students and parents understand and complete their graduation college plan. The personalization inherent in the advising, the graduation/college plan and the reflection upon learning all support the deeper learning required for student success.

This plan describes several strong instructional approaches based on specific cited research that consist of high yield and blended instructional strategies including digital instruction to improve engagement, alignment to college and career readiness standards and to ensure students graduate on time and college and career ready. Digital learning is directly addressed with CSCOPE, a systematic online curriculum model maintained and continuously developed by the ESC Curriculum Collaborative. The plan, through ESC 1, will deliver research based digital content to every classroom aligned with Texas standards in Math and English Language Arts. Students at each campus will have access to digital learning tools. Teachers are encouraged to use various digital learning methods. This then provides a continuous communication vehicle betwen students and teachers with ongoing feedback 24 hours a day.These technological tools will allow students and parents to have increased access to online and digital learning platforms as well as to view each student's progress, ask questions, provide comments and make suggestions.

The data system in the plan informs educators, students and parents of student progress. A crucial feature of the system is the early warning flag in a student profile. Strategies and interventions can then be put in place early in the student's progress, before a student fails a course. This plan is based on appropriate formative and summative assessment systems that diagnose students' aptitudes, abilities, strengths and areas for improvement. This data can then be used in the one-on-one counseling sessions to improve student progress.

The narrative states that students at risk of low perfomance will receive enriched academic instruction, instructional scaffolding, access to online appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional material, academic support services, and access to after school structured study sessions. However, no details are provided to explain how these interventions will be provided or how the achievement gap will be closed.

With the increased use of technology, support at each campus in the form of weekly training, problem-solving, resources, lessons and mentors for both parents and students are built into the plan. these may be offered after school and in the evening in campus computer labs.

Overall, this high quality plan delivers personalized learning, rigorous academic content and digital tools with which to learn. Standards and College and Career Readiness underpin the process. Parents are directly involved and the methodology is based on research. The ESC and consortium have addressed many aspects of the criteria thoroughly. More information concerning closing achievement gaps, relating the various strengths of the plan to their logic model, as well as explaining who is repsonsible for each component would fill in the missing pieces.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	13

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The Esc 1 and consortium schools have a high quality plan for improving the level of effectiveness of their teachers and leaders. Professional development has been integrated into the plan in a variety of venues and concerning a wide variety of topics all based on the plan described in C1. Some of the venues that will increase educator effectiveness include:

- Ongoing and embedded professional development
- Specific monitoring and feedback from instructional coaches and supervisors
- Quarterly planning time to discuss curriculum instruction and assessment
- Learning teams at each school
- A comprehensive educator evaluator system for teachers and leaders
- Teachers training teachers - using master teachers to assist others in language arts academies
- Master's teacher initiative - partnering with universities to provide master's programs to those with bachelor's dfegrees who would like to become peer leaders
- Mentoring teachers to teach effective strategies, use tools, plan lessons
- Principal leadership academy
- Online resources and digital tools

Topics include training on how to use Project based learning, differentiation, and Marzano's high yield strategies. Teachers will also learn how to use data to inform instruction, adjusting pace, complexity and materials based on student needs. No information was given on professional development concerning students from varying cultures, English language needs or specific strategies to help high-risk students.

In section C1,data and its use was described such that it supports student progress and achievement. In this section it is mentioned as being made available to educators, leaders, students and parents. Several specific programs will be used to make the data available in a usable format so that personalized plans of action can be made for students in both cognitive and affective domains.

The professional development and evaluation systems are well developed and described in this section, and seem to lay a good foundation for the plan described in C1. The needs of teachers with little experience, with bachelor's or master's degrees, and school leaders have been addressed. What has not been addressed is the needs of the 9% of teachers (mentioned in section B) who do not have certification or a degree. It could be extrapolated from the offerings of ESC 1 in the area of hiring new staff, that they may be declared ineffective and that new teachers will be hired. There is no specific plan to build their skills or help them to gain certification.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	13

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC1 and consortium have selected two highly qualified leaders to organize, and facilitate this project. The two leaders and the ESC 1 will provide the support necessary to each school in the

consortium. In addition, each school district in the consortium will have a leadership team that will prioritize the collaborative governance structure, policies, rules, procedure, infrastructure, decision-making and leadership practices. The consortium schools plan to coordinate these so that all schools have the ability to meet student needs according to the plan. The personalized learning approach is delineated in a chart that shows the roles and responsibilities of each group. Each school has a site-based management team who posess the flexibility and autonomy over specific factors in each school. These too will be coordinated to enhance the plan.

The focus of the plan and some of the policies of the state of Texas is less focused on time spent in a specific content or topic, but rather is a process of mastering particular learning objectives and demonstrating mastery of learning. Teachers and students will learn and can implement a multi-strand approach for demonstrating mastery of learning. The variety of methods will allow all subgroups the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of learning based on their own strengths and content learned.

The consortium and ESC 1 have mentioned in several sections their focus on differentiated learning to enable success for all students. In this section too, they state that barriers to learning will be overcome. Learning resources and instructional practices will be shared in explicit learning lab environments that help teachers increase the application and use of techniques and strategies. The learning resources are not speccifically mentioned here, although they were referred to in section C1, in regards to specific student groups or learners.

Overall, there seems to be a clear plan in place for learning processes policies and practices based on the information in this section.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The high quality plan submitted by the consortium uses a wide variety of support systems integrated into an organized structure.

The ESC 1 will provide equal access before, during and after school including weekends and summer to all program activities, content, tools, learning resources, technology, support and other related items in the proposed scope of work. To ensure equitable dissemination of program information, all information and communication will be bilingual in both Spanish and English. LEAs in the consortium are also encouraged to recruit and hire staff that represent the targeted population being served. An integral part of this system is the mentoring and coaching of cohort teachers, students and teachers as mentioned in section C2.

ESC 1 describes the online data management systems in use for budgeting, human resources, student data, demographics, organizational data, and program data.These seem quite extensive. All classrooms and offices have high speed internet access, and 75% of participating educators possess iPads or laptops to be used in educational efforts. ESC 1 will utilize one-to-one secured web based tutoring resources and the cyber mentoring mentioned earlier in connection with high school and college students. There are also a suite of tools for website publishing, discussion and collaboration among parents, nonparticipating teachers, prinicpals and administrators. There is access to third party databases including comprehensive student data at the state level. There is also a modification in the database management system that addresses data storage, reporting and diagnostic assessment. This information will be availble to all stakeholders in customized formats. Data then,and resources are readily available online through these programs and services.

The project director, mentioned in section D1, will use these systems as a means to manage and monitor the program implementation activities. In the event that things are not working according to the project plan, the director, staff partners, leadership team and executive council will immediately develop an action plan.

The systems for data storage, retrieval and management are interoperable, available to appropriate publics and useful to the implementation of this plan by all participating members

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Since the consortium has a strong oversight and leadership system involving representative stakeholders and they are monitoring data closely, they are likely to make adjustments and revisions during implementation as needed.

The ESC 1 and consortium of participating schools have developed a progress monitoring and continuous improvement system for this project that will enhance the project development and allow for changes as needed. The major components involve creating a vision for school improvemnt, gathering and analyzing data, developing a plan and implementing strategies, and gathering post implementation data to measure the impact of the intervention. These efforts will be led by district and school level leadership teams, school leaders and an independent evaluator and the staf involved with this project. There are a variety of supports built in for school leaders, teachers, students and for the structure of the project.

Not only does the consortium expect to monitor the plan and continually improve it, they want to maintain the momentum of the project with all publics throughout the plan timeline. They expect to meet with school staff, parents, residents, and local businesses through advisory councils, focus groups, surveys and other outreach to ensure continued buy-in. They will use various media outlets to to educate, encourage, influence and demonstrate to non-participating schools, students and parents that higher standards and college is accessible to all learners.

Data will be used to promote continuous improvement. The consortium sees this as a powerful lever to expose and explore inequities, systemic biases and change beliefs and practices needed to improve the achievement of all students.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Since the project was designed with input from all stakeholder groups, the consortium will engage these groups in a variety of on-going communication methods. Parent communication is a large part of this:

- Monthly community based forums and training sessions to involve parents in their child's education
- Student assessment information will be sent to parents.
- Parents engaged in strategic planning through Parent Advisory Councils.

Student input will be obtained through student led conferences and Youth Leadership Councils. Parnet and student surveys will be administered annually. Principals will qalso engage and communicate with staff memers on a quarterly basis to share the staus of school improvement efforts.

Modes of communication include websites, newspapers, TV, newsletters, e-mails and news releases. The ESC 1 DIS director will oversee this communication to ensure that a common message is sent to all stakeholders.

The consortium has, through these efforts and in previous explanations of the plan, demonstrated that they expect communication to play a large part in the success of this plan.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium selected measures that assessed college and career readiness since this is one of the major goals of the plan. They have already found an increase in students taking the ACT and SAT assessment indicating some interest in college readiness. In addition to local, regional and national college entrance measures, they are also using the state's new assessment system; STAAR at grades 3-8, For high school students, there are 12 End of Course (EOC) assessments in courses students typically take in their first three years of high school.

Campus facilitators and the evaluator will monitor the data and endsure that each LEA is on track with perfomance measures and the plan's goals. The monitoring will ensure that adjustments are made as needed.

The consortium has included updated and rigorous available assessments, has a plan in place for reviewing and improving if necessary and has sufficient performance measures in place. Based on the information in this section, supplemented by previous sections, it seems clear that the consortium will have strong data to use in the plan.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium included a plan of their logic model which includes inputs or investments, outputs or student services, annual outcomes and a timeline. This is the basis of their evaluation model. They use

the available data of student interest, assessment data, participation rates, educator information and ratings and enter it into a scientific research model based on quantitative ananlysis. They include a control and experimental group, use of quantitative measures to determine signficance of the gain between pre and post test scores by a T-test with a 95% confidence level. In addition to t-tests, variance and correlation analysis will be used to assess quantitative data. Chi-square test and descriptive statistics will be used with qualitative data. It is a very thorough model of evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the plan.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 and consortium school districts request $39,969,362 to serve 33,889 annually over 4 years. This translates to $1,179.41 per student. In addition to these funds, the ESC 1, the consortium LEAs and their network of partners have committed approximately $10,298,000 in resources that include both in-kind and cash contributions over the same 4 year period. The budget includes professional develpment, support of various types for educators, students and families, stipends, instructional assistance, personal and academic tutoring, mentoring and counseling, monitoring and feedback mechanisms. It also includes sufficient staff, technology, supplies and materialsto support the activities and objectives of the plan.

They include a chart of various sources of funding including a description and the amount from each. There are 9 additional sources of funding outside of the grant, the ESC 1 and the consortium LEAs. They briefly explain some one time funding aspects in the project as opposed to on-going expenditures.

This is a concise, informative and thoughtful compilation of funding sources. Clearly, the consortium and their partners have committed resources to the success of the project.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	8

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 and collaborating school districts have spent 18 months identifying and discussing the needs for the programs involved in the plan. They have committed their efforts and resources to it as explained in F1. The partnerships developed by these LEAs are also committed to the plan. The plan includes capacity building and professional development for educators and administrators. The materials, software and equipment purchased will remain available for use long after the grant. The leadership development activities will lead to better overall operations of maningful learning environments in participating schools. The executive council will help participating school districts with future services. The people involved throughout the project will see to its continued success. All of these are good reasoins to expect the project goals will become institutionalized and can be sustained beyond the 4 year grant period.

There is more. The ESC 1 lists the many grant projects with which they have been involved, the amount of funding they received from these projects as well as future funding that will be coming into play. Since they have been successful gaining grants and funding before, they are likely to continue this success. They report having raised $80,000,000 in federal, state and private dollars in the past 6 years to support turnaround school efforts, college and career awareness and other reform measures. They do not report on the success of previous grant funded reform efforts. The success and sustainability of previous grant supported reform efforts would certainly indicate the liklihood of the sustainability of this reform project.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	7

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 and consortium school districts have formed partnerships with universities and local agencies to focus on exemplary school standards, college and career readiness and academic achievement such that students can be globally competitive, life-ready and successful. They recognize the schools cannot do all of this in isolation. They list 6 partnerships in this section, but more partnerships were listed and explained in previous sections. These partners have been actively engaged before this grant project plan was designed and will likely continue after the grant timeline has passed. The partners are also involved in a School/Community Advisory Council that assists with decision making for the local schools.

There are 10 identified desired results for specifgic populations in another enclosed chart. Three of them target parents and/or families. They address safe schools, continuing education for parents, financial literacy, attendance and life choices among others. Several results involve the community as well. Similar data will be tracked for these results as for the main part of the plan. The same data bases will be used. Additional surveys, focus groups and interviews will be conducted to collect data to monitor the progress of these goals or desired results. As stated in section C, the same types of data analysis and dissemination will take place.

In order to scale-up there will be ongoing training to teachers, principals qand superintendents that align with the TL2 Theory of Change reform model as described in section C2. The collaborative will also conduct and share evaluation findings, through digital, conference, articles/reports and consultations with other interested educators.

Again, more details concerning how students at high risk will espcially be targeted in these efforts, helping to close achievement gaps are missing.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The ESC 1 has shown it's level of success in working with a variety of schools and school districts on reform efforts. They have worked with grant projects, have formed viable partnerships and developed adult education services. They also have a well developed data system to support school reform and reporting efforts.

In working with this consortium, the collaborative has set some very ambitious goals to create personalized learning environments that will improve student achievement to at least state averages or better, to create supports for educators, students and parents, to involve all stakeholders in decision making with the end result of students being college and career ready. What makes these especially lofty goals is that several of these schools are in the lowest 5% in the nation. The students involved are from subgroups that have social and financial issues that cause barriers to learning.

The plan calls for a variety of efforts that will improve student achievement through improvemnts in curriculum, educator effectiveness, digital learning, parent involvement and supported by an array of

professional development. It is a comprehensive and cohesive plan that has a good chance for success because it is supported by data, by research and by the strong desire of the schools and partnerships to make it happen.

Total	210	180

Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0241TX-3 for Region One Education Service Center (ESC 1)

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant demonstrates a clear vision for reform and targeted application of resources to tailor personalized learning environments for students who are most at-risk and high needs. A comprehensive and ambitious model has been created by the LEA: The Teachers as Leaders of Learning (TL2) Ensuring Academic Rigor for All, which provides convincing ideals grounded in research and data, and focuses investments on educator effectiveness and student engagement. There is an appropriate emphasis on empowering educators through individualized supports and collaboration, while remaining student-centered by focusing on increased rigor and standards-based instruction to increase college and career readiness. Particularly notable, is the LEA's commitment to equity and their willingness to tackle challenging issues like the transition of students to high school, due to a high number of students who do not successfully complete the 9th grade.

There is a significant amount of credibility to the vision, based on assertions regarding data-driven decision-making, aligned policies, increased transparency and communication, as well as capitalizing on existing structures like District and Campus Leadership Teams. It is apparent that the LEA has a high quality vision, and ambitious yet achievable goals in areas related to improving curriculum and instruction to be personalized and rigorous, integrating data systems for enhanced usability, developing educator effectiveness, and an intense focus on turning around low-performing schools by establishing college and career cultures. There are few weaknesses in the vision, particularly in the areas of recruitment and retention of educators, as well as ongoing evaluative processes to monitor progress of both educator and program effectiveness. Overall the stated investments are sound in relationship to priority outcomes, but need a bit more depth of information about how the student experience will be changed by the proposed reforms.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The specificity and thoughtfulness of the selection for participating schools is evident, through the applicant's innovative approach to identification of schools deemed Priority, Focus, and Support Schools based on data and reliable performance measures. The proposal will target low-income and high needs students and supporting documentation is available to verify the participating students from 11 school districts at 42 different middle and high schools. Of the 42 participating schools, 5 are among the lowest achieving in the nation and will benefit from the most intensive supports, backed by personnel investments and collaborative structures for effective implementation. There is substantiation that efforts were made to ensure that participating schools were targeted based on their potential for addressing equity and for delivering additional services to students that need them the most. There are still some questions that remain about why the proposal will only address all 8th grade students and all 9th-12th grade students at participating schools.

	Available	Score
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The proposed plan is feasible, and can be considered high quality based on the level of detail and organizational foundation presented by the applicant. Some of the ambitious nature of the application stems from the model created and how it will be brought to scale and translated for meaningful reform across different schools, in different districts, with different needs. The eight strategic guiding principles presented as a part of this vision, truly connect policy and practice, and are convincing as the right course commitment to achieve this ambitious plan.

The major initiatives developed, coordinate well with the Theory of Action, and relate to outcomes that will meet the absolute priority of this application. The focus on teacher effectiveness, school turnaround, and college and career readiness demonstrates the quality approach to transformative change leading to a realization of personalized learning environments for all students. Also noteworthy are details related to the empowerment of educators as leaders, and the fidelity of implementation grounded in maintaining a high bar for all stakeholders. This proposal will clearly leverage existing strengths while helping to close gaps that are obstructing additional progress, like a lack of formative assessment data. The timelines associated with the plan are highly technical, and need to be decoded in order to ensure all stakeholders are clear about their deliverables and target outcomes. Better integration will be required between the narrative, theory of change, project plans, goals, and outcomes, in order to make progress smooth and with a high level of accountability.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The effort to tackle the goals for the participating schools and students are justifiably focused on decreasing achievement gaps in all areas. In fact in the context of achievement gaps, the LEA utilized graduation gaps in addition to performance. The difficulty in the complex nature of a regional center coordinating the work of the participating school districts is to have a clear focus, so performance targets can be easily identifiable and reachable, and that is not achieved here. The quantity of information provided perhaps derailed efforts to create clear distinct targets that would be traceable based on the investments proposed. There are a few weaknesses in the performance goals, specifically a lack of actual grade-level data, and targets that exceed 100%, but overall the information is certainly thorough and ambitious.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	11

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Overall the clear record of success demonstrated arises from the particular vantage point of the applicant as a Regional Education Service Agency (ESC1), and their ability to provide services that have definitive connections to student outcomes.   As one of the most economically rural/urban depressed areas in the United States, ESC 1 has a clear role in bolstering the capacity of smaller school districts through their management expertise of large-scale grants and strategic deployment of targeted resources. The applicant provided significant evidence of managing grants to successful results, for example, the High School Redesign Project implemented in 2 of the largest districts participating in the proposal. Systemic efforts led by ESC1 in these districts advanced college and career ready goals and indicators such as an increase of 126% enrollment in AP/IB courses as well as an 11.4% increase in graduation rates. The implementation of the GEAR UP program had a marked impact on high needs students, increasing academic proficiency for English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged students. The narrative and accompanying data lacks detail about the progress of Special Education students.

The presentation of data is limited somewhat in scope and less focused than it could be to provide a clear picture of the track record of success. However, ESC1 has managed to execute ambitious reform efforts recently, in some of the lowest achieving schools, which bodes well for the investments presented in this proposal. In addition the data infrastructure is strong, and will be enhanced by additional investments to help increase transparency and drive data-based decision-making. More emphasis is needed on community outreach and improving parental and student engagement in the results-oriented movement of college and career readiness.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	**5**	**5**

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant fulfills all of the requirements of the criteria, and asserts that it will continue to advance efforts to become even more transparent capitalizing on local expertise in this arena. While not required, given the substantial evidence of prior grant awards success, it may have been relevant to explain reporting mechanisms on investments at the agency level to demonstrate their role in fostering transparency vs. district compliance.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	**10**	**8**

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The conditions for success of the applicant are well supported under Texas State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements. Some major highlights that support the autonomy and flexibility of the LEA to advance personalized learning environments in regional districts are: the new STAAR assessment along with numerous well-documented college and career readiness initiatives, Independent School Districts (ISDs) with local control, local Education Service Agencies (such as the applicant), statewide online learning environment, and supporting legislation to increase accountability and readiness. Another relevant data point was provided to present positive conditions for addressing achievement gaps, by tracking data of students opting out of the default college and career ready curriculum and into a less rigorous curriculum comprised of minimum requirements. There is an obvious student-centered context for implementation, with much less emphasis on teacher quality and tracking of educator effectiveness.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	**10**	**8**

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant delivers documented evidence of meaningful stakeholder engagement and support from focus groups, an educator survey, as well numerous letters of support from a wide range of organizations. Their comprehensive evaluation resulted in stakeholder feedback impacting the proposal and determinations related to targeted participants. In all instances the applicant demonstrates a research-based, ongoing approach to developing high quality plans that address stakeholder needs through a continuous feedback cycle with regional and curriculum advisory councils.

The applicant received an impressive 75% response rate from participating educators with 95% either strongly agreeing or agreeing that they support the proposal. The most notably absent form of engagement is with parents and students. This section could have benefitted from a more 360 degree view from those who will be directly affected by the proposal. All participating districts have signed an initial MOU to pledge their full support of the application, which demonstrates an essential commitment accross the consortium.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	**5**	**5**

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Priorities have been established to address needs and gaps in the areas of student college readiness and educator effectiveness. Both priorities are well documented with data through survey responses and standardized assessments. The region the applicant serves lags 10% behind the statewide average in college readiness in both ELA and Math TAKs performance measurement, and the high quality plan associated with the proposal aims to close this gap. Identified subgroups of English Language Learners and low-income students to be served by the proposal, are 15-13% behind in college enrollment and will benefit from the increased support from personalized learning environments.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	**20**	**17**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

There is exhaustive detail available regarding the research-based approach to improving the academic experience for students to be engaged through personalized learning environments. Investments have been devised to impress why college and career aligned learning goals are important and related supports for students and parents to help identify pathways through multiple access points: 8th Grade Summer Bridge Program, Customized Graduate Plans, College Access Program, Digital Outreach and Awareness Activities, and ITunes U. The applicant presents a mixture of strategies that are both traditional and innovative, supported by evidence of a high quality research-based plan and related mechanisms for delivery.

In addition to classroom-based personalized learning environments, the proposal documents how it will foster a holistic approach through individual engagement and feedback in online learning as well as one-on-one advising to deepen and personalize academic opportunities and learning progressions. The development of Youth Leadership Councils and Parent Leadership Councils will strengthen and empower students and parents to create a college going culture that responds to diverse contexts and perspectives. Further creating deeper college connected roots for participating districts, a tutoring and mentoring program called "Millenials Teaching Millenials" will be implemented.

Access to a rigorous course of study will be provided through the Recommended High School Program or the Distiguished Achievement High School Program, which demonstrates that the applicant commits to providing differentiated pathways to meet the needs of all learners. To bolster these pathways even further to address individual student needs, the proposal expects to provide wrap-around services including Customized Graduation College Plans and an extensive College Access Program. Students will have access to advisors that will support a personalized sequence of learning and exposure grounded in successful transition to high school and preparation that is appropriate and relevant to student needs.

There is reasonable evidence identifying high quality research-based aligned content and diverse learning environments. The proposal loses some credibility in the scope of digital content and the related technological infrastructure to implement such content. Rather than proposing truly blended learning classroom environments, technology is presented as an extension/intervention and communication tool, which creates a sparse focus on increasing digital literacy.

The emphasis on formative assessments and benchmarking qualifies the proposal to be prepared to support diagnostics to hone in on individual student needs. The applicant provides a myriad of approaches designed to consistently encourage academic rigor and responsive instruction in a highly personalized learning environment. Increasing personnel throught the proposal in the form of Technology Specialists and the Campus-based facilitators, will be focused more on technical support than training students to take ownership over their own learning and understanding of their own data. Overall, there are

just a few areas that could be approached more progressively, but the applicant has designed a complete approach to learning that will clearly enhance students preparedness for college and career.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	15

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The essence of the proposal and the keys to success are presented with a true focus on the applicant as a provider and coordinator of job-embedded professional learning steeped in research-based practices. Meeting the new more rigorous academic standards in the State in the challenging context of some of the regions lowest performing schools will require the proposal to be further supplemented by more detailed timelines and activities as it relates to the large scale movement to build capacity in implementing personalized learning environments. While the entire basis for the proposal is sound and convincing in its approach, the evidence of the high quality plans needed to organize this effort are insufficient and in need of integrated development.

The applicant describes the appropriate use and training of teachers on project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and a common curriculum framework as a foundation of optimal learning approaches to adapt content and instruction. Frequent progress monitoring is embedded throughout the proposal, and students at-risk are highlighted strategically for frequent progress monitoring and intervention. The applicant takes the additional step to include surveys, observations, interviews, evaluations, review of student data and activities, and lesson plans and associated quarterly planning time to ensure the fidelity of implementation of personalized learning environments.

The proposed enhancement of a comprehensive educator evaluation system is somewhat vague and is an overall weakness of the proposal. There is strong evidence that the applicant will develop and provide supports to increase effectiveness for all levels of leadership through university partnerships on turnarounds models, teacher-led academies, encouraging teachers to obtain master's degrees, mentoring of teachers from coaches and master teachers, and a semi-annual principal leadership academy designed to focus on essential school improvement planning and monitoring processes.

In the area of actionable information, the applicant provides a large list of technical applications that educators will have access to, but it appears unfocused and perhaps unwieldy without an overarching plan for integration. Educators should benefit from a solid approach to delivering training in a variety of formats and providing resources electronically that include approaches for high need students. It remains unclear where all of this information and data would be warehoused. Importantly, the applicant does highlight an intensive STEM model here that is fundamental to recreating the classroom into a personalized learning environment through inquiry-based learning rather than traditional direct instruction.

Through existing longitudinal data systems, Project Share, and proposed investments, educators will engage in continuously improving feedback and resources to address student needs, which will help realize the absolute priority.   There are 2 models of educator evaluation currently being piloted in the region: Professional Development and Appraisal Systems (PDAS) and Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), which establishes the applicant as tracking toward an educator effectiveness management system. The strength in the proposal remains in the development of a hearty portfolio of differentiated professional development, and the sentiment that an evaluation system should be used to leverage talent. Comprehensive design of professional development and evaluation of all levels of leadership will need to blend synergistically in order for the ambitious reforms to be achievable. There are some feasible ideas as it relates to increasing the number of highly effective teachers in the participating schools, and they should be implemented without delay. The proposed emphasis on multiple career paths, will help build capacity to implement these significant reforms with urgency and support retention of teachers in the classroom.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	13

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant specifies clear direction, organizational capacity, and policy conditions that support implementation of a high quality plan for personalized learning. Experienced professionals are well-positioned to provide oversight of the investments and strong collaborative structures that have been established to coordinate the work of the consortium. A thoughtful framework for implementation of personalized learning was included in the application that underscores the qualified status of the applicant to be the lead agent of this work.

Local control and site-based management are mandated by State law, so the applicant has a distinct advantage as it relates to the amount of autonomy and flexibility participating schools will have to meet the needs of all of their students. The applicant will appropriately empower schools through District and Campus Leadership teams, alongside the Executive Council.

The State policy is committed to meeting students where they are, and the proposed methodology for implementing personalized learning environments will encourage students to progress at their own pace and will align to the State's End-Of-Course standard that requires mastery of three levels. The justified emphasis on differentiation through the Teaching for Learning Design and Delivery model will further elevate the opportunities for success for high needs students. More detailed timelines are needed to further orgnaize the work throughout the term of the grant.

	Available	Score
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	8

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal is convincing as it relates to providing equal access to all necessary content, tools, and other learning resources any time of the day or year, and to communicate and disseminate information about availability and access in both English and Spanish. The focus on building competencies through mentoring and coaching across stakeholders to use technology to improve learning outcomes is appropriate, but lacks some detail as it relates to implementation.

Currently the data systems available while extensive are not necessarily interoperable, and investments proposed would use a credible data management framework to integrate the following three portals – data storage, data reporting, and data diagnostic assessment. The applicant asserts that through the enhanced data system, stakeholders will be able to access real-time and customizable reports based on their needs, which is absolutely crucial to the success of personalized learning environments in the participating schools. This goal is ambitious, but achievable and will have far-reaching effects beyond the scope of the participating schools. The infrastructure appears to be available from the administrative side, but there is less information presented that speaks to the amount of technology available to parents and students to be able to benefit from services like cyber-tutoring.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	13

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

There is unequivocal confirmation that the applicant will engage in a robust and meaningful continuous improvement process though existing District and Campus leadership teams, and investments made in

facilitators and evaluators to coordinate the efforts across the consortium of districts. Through the Learning Connection system and customized local television programming, district and school administrators, teachers, parents, and students will have all of the necessary supports to be able to effectively participate and have access to information about the activities of the grant. The description provided of the strategy for continuous improvement is exceptional and well organized, and highlights the potential of the applicant to use data as a powerful lever to really target the needs of individual students. This approach of collecting and reporting on data in both a formative and summative way is integral to improve outcomes for students. This effort will be a heavy lift for all those involved, and the applicant needs to ensure that the technical tasks of producing this level of reporting does not detract from the focus on student achievement and educator effectiveness. Too often administrative tasks take precious time away from classroom-focused collaboration, and these investments should seek to protect this from happening at all costs.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents a strong platform based on a shared vision and understanding of the reform proposal to ensure academic rigor for all. The need for a diverse strategy for ongoing engagement with the business community, through Parent and Youth leadership councils to engage in strategic planning, public reporting on school improvement progress against state-level accountability standards, is apparent, as these activities would be elevated through the proposed investments. Engagement with educators will be equally impactful, focusing on key ingredients to improving the implementation of personalized learning environments through the following: student diagnostic reports, early warning reports for at-risk students, and college and career readiness reports to assess whether students are on track. Again, some caution is warranted in ensuring that external stakeholders feel as though their active involvement is actually impacting the process and supporting a true feedback loop, and that educators are not overburdened through reporting requests that are not important to their impact in the classroom.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The rationale for performance measures that will be utilized to evaluate progress of investment outcomes is appropriate, and the timing of the investments is well-positioned to take full advantage of the new STAAR assessments focused on college and career readiness aligned with standards, launched in the Spring of 2012. The proposal seeks to broaden the capacity to implement formative assessments, which will be exceedingly important in order to effectively tailor instruction and content to meet the needs of students, and ensure action is taken in a timely way by committing additional resources to high need students while supporting growth for all students. The presentation of a logic model in the context of being able to have structure to review and revisit performance measures is a strong representation of the capacity of the applicant to conduct analyses in an efficient and impactful way, along with all of the other stakeholder structures that will make this reality.

Ambitious but achievable targets for most subgroups across different college readiness benchmarks and content areas are set, promoting goals of all participating students to be at least a level II on the Academic Performance (SAP) on the State (ESEA) Aligned STAAR Assessment. There is some unrealistic expectation associated with targets for special education students and English language learners by increasing proficiency of these subgroups by 70% or more through the proposed grant period. The accompanying structure and plans does not necessarily support this dramatic of an increase in proficiency for the targeted populations. Also, there is some inconsistency with presenting that 100% of participating students will meet targets, when subgroups as suggested above will be expected to be meeting near 75% in some areas. There is a demonstrable focus on promoting academic rigor for all through personalized learning environments and the applicant has set admirable goals for students to obtain the highest level of proficiency a Level III Advanced Academic Performance (AAP) on the State (ESEA) Aligned STAAR. All other performance measures required were completed and the applicant went above and beyond to

provide additional performance measures that are truly relevant to the objectives in this proposal: number of students completing college entrance exams and on track indicators associated, grade point average indicators, postsecondary enrollment, stakeholder engagement, school safety, attendance, digital access,etc.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	4

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The projected process for evaluation of the effectiveness of RTT-D activities is unquestionably comprehensive and technically sound. The applicant will employ an experienced external evaluator, which will augment the proposal extensively. Supportive evidence in the appendix was presented in the form of thoughtful evaluation questions to assess effectiveness. There is clearly a highly developed plan and research base for evaluation of the investments. The applicant must guard against getting too involved in the process and technical reporting and must ensure that the analyses relate to real actionable recommendations that will positively affect change in the classroom, in local policies, and with all stakeholders engaged in these consequential reforms. It should be noted that the applicant also plans to conduct innovative comparison research between participating students and a control group of non-participating students.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant clearly identifies all funding sources that will support the project, which are extensive in the amount of leveraging nearly $10,298,000 in additional resources that include both in-kind and cash contributions over the four year period. The budget is consistent with the proposed comprehensive reforms aimed at achieving personalized learning environments of some of the regions highest needs students. The only areas that are concerning relate to investments in STEM and Literacy Institutes that were not mentioned anywhere else in the proposal. In addition, while the proposed Project Director will oversee the integration of teacher, principal, and superintendent evaluations, this core component is not addressed elsewhere in the budget. Also, while an innovative idea such as an iTunesU platform were expressed in the proposal narrative under section C, it was not covered in the budget.

Requirements are exceeded in providing sufficient rationales for investments and priorities, and clearly express potential for impact beyond the participating schools. Funds are identified as one-time v. ongoing costs, and there is substantial foundation to ensure the sustainability of personalized learning environments. The only other challenge presented by the budget, relates to the lack of focus on specialists to support at-risk, special education, and English Language Learners. This specific expertise will be necessary in order to respond to the highest needs students in the region and should be considered to supplement the proposal.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	9

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has coordinated an entire initiative inside the proposal to focus directly on Continuous Improvement, Sustainability and Scalability, which will contribute to the overall success of the project goals past the grant term. Important details and timelines associated are included and contribute to the credibility of the proposal. There is valid recognition and commitment from relevant leaders and large-

scale financial support and prior grant award success that will contribute to the sustainability of the high quality plans.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	8

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant will deploy a collaborative that integrates public and private resources to augment campus resources by providing additional student and family supports in schools, crucial to meeting their needs and aligned with the Absolute Priority. Along with the consortium, the lead LEA and partners identified the highest needs students to receive direct benefits of these services, which reinforce the proposed investments. The applicant will leverage the creation of the Learning Connection portal to aid in the tracking of relevant student data coming from a plethora of resources identified for the purpose of analyzing student growth.

The partnership collaborative will contribute to scalable school improvement efforts and the enhancement of personalized learning, and will be compelled to contribute to the sharing of best practices, resources, and responsiveness to student needs. The opportunity will exist for the collaborative to benefit from customized student learning profiles and will be integrated with data about academic and social/emotional data that can be used to meet the needs of the students who need these additional services the most. The participating districts will build capacity through shared-decision-making and organization of a "Care team" comprised of key positions to support students in receiving services from partnerships that will improve their academic and social/emotional outcomes. Performance measures are ambitious and achievable and well integrated with the Theory of Change. The applicant is results-oriented and will seek to engage stakeholders in an ongoing assessment of the impact of the partnerships. More formal partnerships may be necessary to address scale and accelerate the target outcomes, and should be considered to support yet to be identified needs in implementing personalized learning environments.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Overall this proposal has a high probability of success based on their track record, research-based methodologies, and targeting of students most in need of personalized learning environments. Uniquely, the applicant has vast experience in implementing large scale grants and reforms with more than $80 million over the last 6 years. Given that the applicant completed a comprehensive needs assessment over the last 18 months, and will be able to leverage more than $10 million dollars in additional funding to support the RTT-D proposal, this grant award may just prove to be the tipping point for more than 30,000 students to become truly college and career ready. In addition, state level policies related to standardized assessments and conditions of autonomy and flexibility backed by the applicant's 46 years of service in the region create a stable environment to coordinate this massive reform effort.

The areas for concern are: teacher, principal, superintendent evaluation design and related measures of educator effectiveness, lack of specialists to assist with students with disabilities and English Language Learners, as well as some disconnect between investments in the narrative but not in the budget, and the

other way around. Also, more emphasis on providing protected collaboration time for educators will be required to implement the intensive supports demanded by personalized learning environments.

The proposal is not all together that innovative, but progressive and aggressive in its approach to meeting the Absolute Priority. The Teachers as Leaders of Learning – Ensuring Academic Rigor for All model is ambitious but achievable and grounded in reliable actions to support closing achievement gaps and deepening the student academic experience.

Total	210	169